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THE JOURNEY BEGINS

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IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

Roland Deschain is the last descendant of the line of Arthur Eld. His late father, Steven, was the king of the barony of Gilead. Seeking to emulate his father, Roland was the youngest man to ever become a gunslinger. Great forces have swirled around him since that day.

When Gilead was under attack by the armies of evil led by Walter O'Dim and the Good Man, John Farson, Steven Deschain was killed. His forces of the White known as The Affiliation faltered in their defense of the city. Roland and his ka-tet became Gilead's final barrier, and they, too, failed.

And for nigh unto ten years, Roland, the lone survivor of that last, losing battle, has pursued his destiny. His quest is to reach the mysterious Dark Tower wherein he can set this out-of-synch world right. And the key to his goal lies with the Man in Black, who Roland now doggedly tracks.

Along the way, the gunslinger stops at the cabin of an old man, when his mule dies of exhaustion. At dinner that evening, Roland reminisces about the aftermath of the battle of Jericho Hill wherein his entire ka-tet was slain, and Deschain himself was dumped upon a pile of corpses.

But one ka-tet member, Aileen, survives, though barely. She begs Roland to return her to Gilead to be buried with her father, Cort.

Once back in the ruins of his home barony and Aileen's burial complete, Roland encounters the ghost of Hax, the once chief chef in the kingdom's castle.

Roland flashes back to when he and Cuthbert overheard Hax selling out the Affiliation to John Farson and they turned Hax in to Steven Deschain. Hax was hung for his crimes and now his ghost offers Roland "rigret" for them.



Roland and the Billy Bumbler
stare at the word on the
ground. The spellin' weren't
right, but the intent was
clear enough.

You regret
your sins, do
you, Rax?

Well, it's too
damned late, cook.
You may have slipped
out of the pits of
Na'ar for the
nonce...

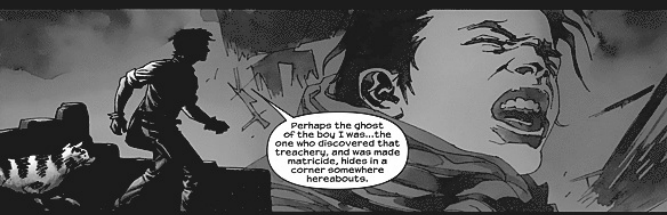
...but save
your regrets
for someone
who cares.



Certainly there are enough ghosts haunting these ruins.

Perhaps my father has become more generous since falling prey to mortality...

...plus he had to endure the treachery of his "beloved" queen wife, my mother. So that may well have changed his perspective on such matters.



Perhaps the ghost of the boy I was...the one who discovered that treachery, and was made matricide, hides in a corner somewhere hereabouts.



And Susan. Poor, tragic Susan Delgado.

In a different world, I would have made you a queen of Gilead.

Does that knowledge cause you to dwell here as well?



The ghosts
crowd us out of
here, Bumbler.
Gilead forever
belongs to the
dead.

Our business
is with the living.
The living who
require the succor
that only the
Park Tower may
provide.

And when we
find the tower,
that great linchpin
of all connecting
universes...

...we will climb
to the top and
demand *Justice* from
whatever resides
within. Only in that
way will a great
future be possible
for --



You almost
tempt me to present
myself as a *target* if
it means being spared
having to listen to
this tripe.



But by all means,
continue your soliloquy
to your associate down
there, since a dumb
animal is the only
creature that might
believe it.

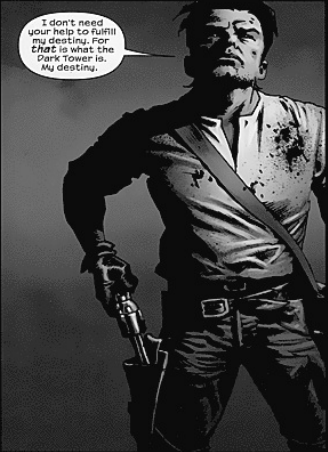
You!
Traitorous
monk! Enemy
of all!



Prepare
to join the
ghosts of
Gilead!



*The Man in Black, he just laughs,
sending Roland's bullets this way
and that with a wave of his hands.*



I don't need
your help to fulfill
my destiny. For
that is what the
Dark Tower is.
My destiny.



You know
that of a
certainty?



Yes.



You are an even **bigger fool** than I credited you gunslinger, and *that's* saying a **great deal**.

You would actually endeavor to kill the one man in all the worlds who can help you **reach** your goal?



Well!
As it so happens...



...you are **correct!**

Come back here, you--!



Damnation.

If he truly is the path to the Dark Tower, I'll find him and beat it out of him.

And so Roland and his animal companion--as odd a Ka-Tet as any ever saw--continue on their path...

...which, some weeks later, leads 'em to a heavily fortified city named Kingstown.

Roland, he don't know what to make of the place. The lands around it are barren and miserable, and the town itself is run-down....



...but instead he finds they're in the middle of a damned carnival.



A pie, sar?
Best pies in
town, they
are!

Your wares
remind me of
such vendors in
my home. We used
to call them
seppie-sais
"Death
dealers."

Ye wound
me, sar,
truly!

Let this salve the wound,
in exchange for information.
A priest in black
cassock...



Priest? Ain't
been none hereabouts
since Farson killed the
last years ago.

If it's news of
travelers ye seek,
though, check with
the Widow Black
at Traveler's
Rest.



Much obliged.
By the way...is
this a holiday?
The carnival--

Why, we be
havin' a Not-Kan
t'day! No better
reason than that for
celebratin', sari!



No, I
suppose
not.







Hear ye,
hear ye!

I do not have
to tell any of you
of the menace that
the Not-Men have
posed to our fair
town since the
forces of John
Farson came
through!

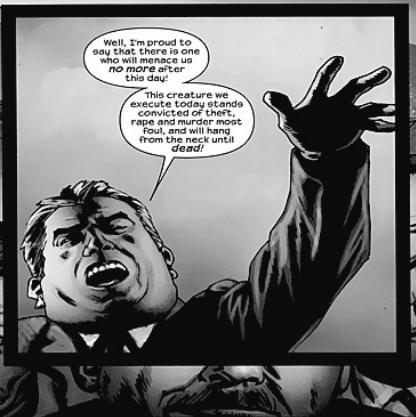


'Bout time
we caught
one of the
bastards!

"We." As if *you*
contributed!



No sense in
struggling, you!
Because you
may be a
Not-Man...



...the thud of a trap door,
the distinctive popping
sound of a neck...

...and the Not-Man's
chains flail for a moment
before going limp.

He goes from Not-Man
to not anything at all,
and the crowd goes
berserk...



...save for Roland, who has
seen too much death to feel
anything except sick of it.



*And that's when he feels
a warm breath on the back
of his neck, and words
coming from thin air...*

*My brother...
damn them...
they'll pay for
that...*

*There's another
one! A Not-Man!
I've got him! I--*

*But holding on to
something you can't
rightly see is harder
than grabbing a
greased pig.*

*The Not-Man slips Roland's grasp,
and although people scatter as
Roland goes in pursuit...*

*...the Not-Man
disappears.*

Later, taking the pie seller's advice, Roland takes up residence at the Traveler's Rest. He ponders the fact that the town obviously ain't done with Not-Men...

...and wonders what further threats they might pose.





That old hut
seems to have
captured your
attention,
sar.

Kardly one
of our city's most
attractive
sights.

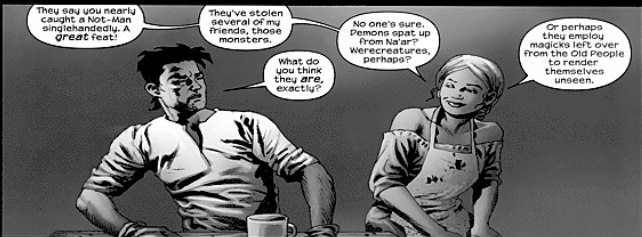
Well,
it's...

Sar?

Susan?
I...I mean...

Who...?
Who, uh...*are*
you?

Me?





Yes. That's exactly right.



And did it? Contain weapons, I mean.



Believe it or not, Farson didn't see fit to inform me of what he did or did not discover.

All I know is that after Farson's troops departed, that was when the Not-Men showed up.



How typical for Farson to leave all manner of destruction in his wake.



You seem to know very much about him. Have you suffered at Farson's hands?



Yes. But not as much as he will suffer at mine.



Roland, of course, does not realize that his words of bravado have been heard by someone other than young Susan the waitress.

By a creature whose footprints--and naught else--were visible outside the window.



Is it Roland's vehemence, or his focus on Susan, that drew the deadly watcher's attention? Couldn't say for certain.

All I ken is this:



To come into Roland's orbit is to court disaster, and there ain't no reason that Susan should be any exception.



But the Not-Man is stronger still, and even though she struggles something fierce...



...and even tears loose a piece of his clothing which instantly turns visible...

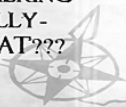


...eventually her mother arrives only to scream in horror as the limp body of her daughter is carted out into the night.



TO BE CONTINUED

A TALKING BILLY- WHAT???



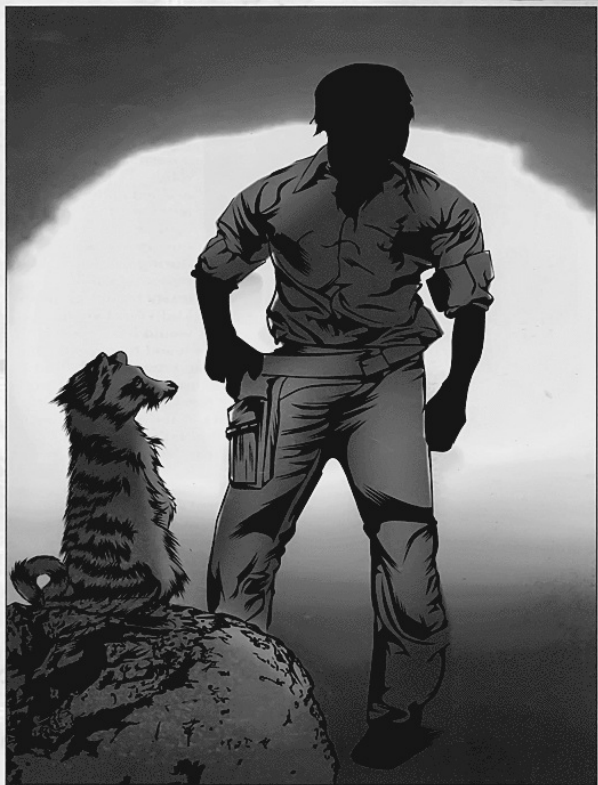
What exactly is a billy-bumbler? Although longtime Dark Tower fans are probably smiling and shaking their heads as I say this, I'm sure that a few new Mid-Worlders have asked themselves this very question. What exactly is the significance of Roland's latest furry companion, and who in the world taught him to speak?

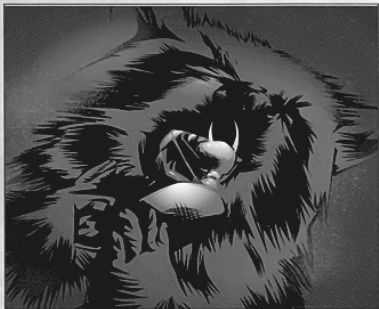
As those who've read the Dark Tower novels know, billy-bumblers — also called throcken — are very common Mid-World animals. They are sometimes said to resemble badgers crossed with raccoons, or raccoons crossed with woodchucks and dachshunds. Bumlbers have large, gold-rimmed eyes, whiskery snouts, graceful necks, short strong legs, and long, closely coiled tails that look like fur-covered bedsprings. Their black and grey pelts are striped and incredibly soft. Bumlbers can wag their tails like dogs, but they are much more intelligent than canines. They can parrot human speech, and some can even count. A groom that Roland knew as a boy once swore that he'd owned a bumbler that could add and subtract by scratching the stable floor with its claws or by pushing

stones together with its muzzle.

Although they are not generally believed to be as loyal as dogs, those who have lived with bumblers swear to the creatures' almost human capacity for emotion. A person cannot dominate a bumbler and command its loyalty the way he can with a canine, but he can earn that devotion. A throcken's trust may not be easy to gain, but once that bond is forged it lasts for life. Bumlbers have been known to defend their masters against attackers many times larger than themselves, and to weep with grief when any of their human companions die.

After the fall of In-World many bumblers became feral. Packs of wild throcken could be found scavenging for food in deserted towns and villages or nesting in abandoned and derelict buildings. But even after running wild and forgetting how to speak, bumblers rarely forget their bond with humans. They may steal food and generally make nuisances of themselves, but they have never been known to attack men or women without extreme provocation. And it seems that men and women have not forgotten their bonds with bumblers either, since few if any hunt bumblers for food. As the old saying goes, "animals that talk be tough," but that is not the only reason that bumblers are never used as a food source. To eat a bumbler is like eating a pet dog. In desperation it might be done, but it is not a pleasant experience.





Fleas could be found wherever the monstrous Grandfathers came to feed, bumlbers were excellent early warning systems. By seeking out and killing the parasitic insects that followed the vampires and fed on their leftovers, the bumlbers could root out these humanoid parasites during their dormant periods. Without their trusty bumlbers, many Mid-World villagers would have been

Although throcken's desire for human company is well known, this natural camaraderie should never be mistaken for generalized docility. When provoked, these little creatures are both strong and fierce. In the days of Eld, when the demons of the Prim roamed the earth, bumlbers were bred to hunt down Grandfather Fleas—those horrific mouse-sized parasites that followed in the wake of the blood-drinking and flesh-eating Type One vampires. Since Grandfather

bled-to-death and then eaten by vampires, and many more would have been transformed into blood-drinkers themselves.

In later years, when the threat of the Grandfathers receded and even their parasitic fleas became the stuff of legend, bumlbers used their predatory instincts to hunt down rats. Hence, every barony castle in Mid-World kept a few in order to control their rodent populations. Rural homesteaders

BILLYBUMBLERS OF MIDWORLD



also found bumblebees to be valuable companions, since in addition to ratting they could also herd animals, rounding up sheep and cattle as efficiently as sheepdogs. Hence it's not surprising that in Mid-World folklore, good bumblebees are believed to bring good luck.

By far the most famous bumbler in the Dark Tower series is Jake's companion Oy, whom we meet in *The Waste Lands*. Although he's small, Oy has as much personality and heart as any of his human companions—a fact that is obvious from the moment he joins our tet by waking eleven-year-old Jake with a slobbery lick. Unlike the wild bumblebees that Roland and his friends have encountered up to this point, little Oy remembers words. In fact, it is probably his constant chattering that made his pack expel him from their group. But though Oy's intelligence was not appreciated by his own kind, it is appreciated by Roland, his tet-mates, and Oy's many human fans.

When I asked Steve King's permission to include a bumbler in this story arc, he gave me an enthusiastic yes. His one prerequisite was that our Billy show himself to be part of Oy's ka-tet, something which I tried to incorporate throughout our tale. Although I don't want to say too much about this yet for fear of spoiling the story to come, hardcore Dark Tower fans may have already picked up on several of my



hints. Just as Oy was the devoted companion of eleven-year-old Jake, so Billy was the friend of a young merchant boy named John. (As my fellow Dark Tower junkies will remember, Jake's real name was John "Jake" Chambers.) Like Oy Billy is of Roland's ka-tet. And just as Oy serves the White, so Billy will stand and be true. Although he is a bumbler, he will remember the faces of his fathers, and of the gunslinger he has chosen to serve.

Until we meet next month—
Long days and pleasant nights.

Robin Furth

ART EVOLUTION

FOLLOW SEAN PHILLIPS AND RICHARD ISANOVE'S STEPS AS THEY BRING THE DARK TOWER TO LIFE

PAGE 1

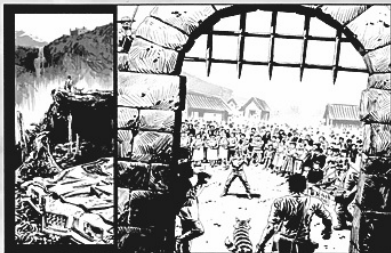


PAGE 3









SEAN PHILLIPS INKS FOR THE ISSUE 4 COVER



NEXT: AYE. A GUNSLINGER MAY SHOOT WITH HIS EYE...
BUT WHAT IF YER TARGET IS UNSEEABLE?





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, has seen his father's Affiliation fall to the Good Man's forces. With his ka-tet murdered and Gilead in ruins, the troubled Deschain is now truly alone for the first time in his life. But there is hope: Roland stalks the deserts in search of the Man in Black, who holds the key to righting this out-of-synch world. What lies in wait for the world's last gunslinger, though, no seeing sphere could portend...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life comes a new phase in the saga of the last gunslinger. This is a dark chronicle of revenge, lust, betrayal, and destiny—a cosmic quest that could only be conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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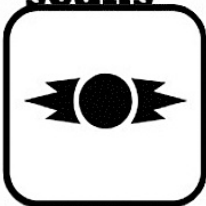
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